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**PARTICIPATION OF SOCIAL CSOs IN THE OMC INCLUSION:
HOW DOES IT AFFECT EUROPEAN GOVERNANCE AND CSOs
THEMSELVES?**

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Aida Kisunaite, Vilnius, September, 2012.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CSO	Civil society organisation
EAPN	European Anti Poverty Network
EAPN	Lithuanian Anti-Poverty Network
Lithuania	
EDF	European Disability Forum
FEANTSA	European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless
HRMI	Human Rights Monitoring Institute
LNF	Lithuanian Forum for Disabled
NAP	National Action Plan
NAPincl	National Action Plan on social inclusion
NGOs	Non governmental Organisations
NISC	Non-governmental Organisations Information and Support Centre
NRP	National Reform Program
NSR	National Strategic Report
OMC	Open method of coordination
PPMI	Public Policy and Management Institute
SPC	Social Protection Committee

ABSTRACT

Participation of civil society actors in the OMC process is one of dominant strands in current debate on the OMC. In this paper we aim to understand how social CSOs) participate in the OMC inclusion; how participation changes the original role of CSOs in European policy making; and what kind of inter-organisational relations emerge between national and European CSOs. At the European level we study four European networks: EAPN, FEANTSA, Eurochild, and EDF. At the national level we analyse Lithuanian members of these European networks: EAPN Lithuania, Caritas Lithuania, HRMI, and LNF. Our analysis is based on data that we obtained from interviews. In the case of European networks we also use documentary analysis on the basis of the networks' publications on the OMC. Our findings suggest that participation of European networks in the OMC processes is not homogenous. The latter finding is an important factor in studying relations between European networks and national CSOs, and gives a background to question the validity of the hypothesis, which is present in the literature, that national CSOs' relations with European networks increase their mobilization around NAPs/NSR. In addition to that our findings shed light on difficulties that European networks face while participating in the OMC process, which apart from S. Kröger's attempts, were generally ignored in the literature. At the national level we do not find any procedural shifts regarding CSOs participation in Lithuania. However our research reveals some positive implications of participation in NAP/NSR process. Our study confirms that European networks' consultation and information providing role remains prevailing over collaboration and empowerment also in the OMC context. Meanwhile in the case of Lithuanian CSOs, there are signs that national OMC processes have created conditions for shaping more positive attitude on a governmental side, however they have not changed CSOs role essentially. Finally we find out that Lithuanian CSOs connection with European networks, as an important factor for mobilising them around NAPs, was only partially true for Lithuanian case. In general terms the OMC's contribution to Europeanise Lithuanian CSOs is limited. Our findings suggest that validity of statements regarding CSOs participation in the OMC in the 'old' member have limited applicability for the new member states such as Lithuania, and thus indicates a need for a new research strand on European governance-civil society relations in Central and Eastern Europe.

INTRODUCTION

Contextual information and research gaps

OMC was introduced into European social policy making in 2000, and one of its distinguishing features is the emphasis on all relevant stakeholders involvement in policy making process at all levels of governance. CSOs, as one group of stakeholders, participation in the OMC requires particular attention for several reasons. First of all, participation of CSOs in the OMC process is related to the OMCs' democratic potential (D. Friedrich, 2006). Secondly, after the OMC's establishment in the field of social policy, participatory approach has been extended to other policy fields such as youth, education, and culture (European Commission, January 2012).

On the one hand literature on CSOs participation in the social OMC shows that European as well as national CSOs were using OMC as a political opportunity to make their voice heard. On the other hand studies point to the problematic aspects regarding CSOs participation such as apathetic governmental approach (EAPN, 2008d); and no regular CSOs inclusion patterns at both European and national levels (D. Friedrich, 2006; S. Kröger, 2007).

Despite the controversy about the OMC's impact on European and national CSOs participation we have learned from the literature that the relations between European networks and national CSOs in the OMC context is an important issue to study because not only OMC processes directly, but also their indirect effects might have consequences on CSOs participation. Three studies (C. De la Porte, 2007; INBAS, 2010, K. Armstrong, 2010) have claimed that mobilized social CSOs in the OMC inclusion are those CSOs, that have strong direct or indirect links with one more European umbrella organizations. Another effect was also noted in the literature. As D. Friedrich (2006:375-378) notes, the OMC process stimulated vertical cooperation between national federal umbrella organisations and

European social umbrella NGOs such as EAPN.

We note three research gaps in the previous studies that deal with European networks' participation in the OMC. No in-depth comparative analysis has been done yet on how European networks participate in the OMC process. In addition to that such question as European networks relations with their national members in the OMC context, despite its acknowledgement to be a precondition for better national CSOs involvement, has never be studied in so far. Moreover a question of changes, that OMC may bring to CSOs activities in comparison to their previous role, has not been addressed in the literature.

Objectives and research questions

The overall aim of our project is to contribute to the academic debate on the OMC, and European governance-civil society relations. There are three main research strands present in the literature in relation to the OMC. The first strand focuses on the OMC as an innovative way of European policy making, and deals with the research questions such as functional and political origin of the OMC, its mechanisms and implementation (D. Friedrich, 2006:3). Meanwhile the second research theme "(...) is concerned with social policy and the OMC's possible contribution to Europe's social dimension. The third strand of discussion reflects normative expectations of both scholars and policy-makers with regard to the OMC's democratic potential for the EU" (D. Friedrich, 2006:3). In the literature there is a view that linking governance with civil society constitutes a challenge for political and policy studies, and the relationship between the two terms "(...) remain under-researched, both in terms of normative basis and with respect to policy-making" (C. Ruzza, 2007b:140).

By analysing European and national social NGOs' participation in the OMC process we aim to contribute to the first and second strands of the academic discussion on the OMC, and European governance-civil society studies. For the purpose of our analysis we develop following

research questions. As first we focus on understanding *how do civil society organisations (CSOs) participate in the social OMC process?* **(RQ1)**. Subsequently, we aim to understand *what participation of CSOs in the OMC reveals about the role of CSOs in the EU policy making in general?* **(RQ2)**. Finally we aim to examine *how does participation of civil society organizations in the OMC contribute to the Europeanization process of social CSOs in Lithuania* **(RQ3)?**

Methodology

For the achievement of our research objectives we choose to examine four European networks: EAPN, FEANTSA, Eurochild, and EDF. In addition to that we study national members of these organisations, and for this purpose we choose Lithuanian case. We study EAPN Lithuania, Caritas Lithuania - member of FEANTSA, HRMI- member of Eurochild, and LNF - member of European Disability Forum. We choose to focus on Lithuania following a “least likely case” logic for the OMC’s influence.

At the European level we examine European networks’ involvement in the OMC by applying documentary analysis and interpretation of interview results. At the national level we collect our data from interviews with CSOs, the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, national expert on social inclusion. We interpret our data by applying Europeanization and political opportunities approaches.

Structure

We divide our research into four main chapters. In Chapter 1 we overview the literature on the OMC and CSOs participation. As first, we start from a general context and in the first subpart present general linkages between European governance and civil society. This is followed by an overview of the literature on the issue of participation in the OMC employment and OMC inclusion, which is divided according to European and national CSOs participation in the OMC processes, with a particular emphasis on the findings regarding the case of Lithuania. The first chapter ends with the two subchapters on

the issues of Europeanization in relation to the OMC and CSOs. Chapter 2 is devoted to the methodological aspects of the thesis, in which we discuss theoretical orientation of the study; operationalise research questions; present research strategy and research design; and finally describe our research process. In Chapter 3 we focus on the analysis of European networks participation in the OMC, and start with the documentary analysis of the European networks publications on the OMC. This is followed by our interviews results and general discussion. Chapter 4 is devoted to Lithuanian case study. It starts with a general introduction to the development of Lithuanian poverty and social exclusion reduction policy, and overview of main actors that participate in the process. This is followed by a subchapter on Lithuanian CSOs participation in the OMC inclusion, which consists of a general remarks on Lithuanian social CSOs that are followed by analysis of and discussion on Lithuanian CSOs participation in the OMC processes at national and European levels. In the final Chapter we draw general conclusions about European networks and Lithuanian CSOs participation in the OMC inclusion, and whether or not this has had some implication on their role. We also draw conclusions on the issue of Europeanization of Lithuanian CSOs.